Shaykh Muhammad Saleem Dhorat *ḥafiẓahullāh*

TIME 2 CHANGE



at-tazkiyah

TIME TO CHANGE
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Foreword

As we travel slowly to the end of our earthly lives and to the beginning of a new life that will never end, the question on every individual's mind has to be: 'When will my preparation for this promised afterlife begin?'

Based on the verse from the Glorious Qur'ān in which Allāh ﷾ poses this very question, the respected Shaykh-al-Ḥadīth, Shaykh Muhammad Saleem Dhorat *ḥafiẓahullāh*, in his ever heartfelt, touching and well explained manner, takes the audience through answering this question to giving it a practical outcome.

This booklet is a translation of the respected Shaykh's inspiring lecture, 'Kya Zindagī Badalne Ka Waqt Nahi(n) Āyā?' delivered in Urdu during one memorable night of Ramaḍān 1427 AH (2006 CE). I was one of the hundreds fortunate to be

present on this great night and witness the effects of words, which truly could only have been inspired by the Almighty. Hearts were softened, tears flowed, and the determination to make that *the moment to change*, was visible on almost every member of the gathering.

Indeed Mashā'ikh like our respected Shaykh *ḥafiẓahullāh*, who remain so fearful of Allāh ﷻ and with this, carry the deepest feeling for the Ummah, are few and far between. Any work of theirs that reaches us, should be valued wholeheartedly, and embraced in to our lives on a practical level. I hope this booklet will bring the effect of that very special night to every reader and help them decide that now is the *time to change!*

(Shaykh) Junayd Makda
9 Rabī'ul Awwal 1431

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

A Question from Allāh سبحانه وتعالى

Allāh سبحانه وتعالى says in the Glorious Qur'ān:

أَلَمْ يَأْنِ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَنْ تَخْشَعَ قُلُوبُهُمْ لِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَمَا نَزَلَ
مِنَ الْحَقِّ وَلَا يَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ مِنْ قَبْلُ فَطَالَ
عَلَيْهِمُ الْأَمَدُ فَقَسَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ ۖ وَكَثِيرٌ مِنْهُمْ فَاسِقُونَ ﴿١٦﴾

> Has the time not yet come for the believers that their hearts submit before the remembrance of Allāh and the Truth that has been revealed? They must not become like those to whom the Book was given before and then a long time passed and their hearts became hard. And many of them were transgressors. (57:16)

Allāh سبحانه وتعالى addresses a particular group of individuals in this verse - those who have already been blessed with the great gift of īmān, yet who continue to

disobey Him. He is asking those believers who are involved in sins: "Has the time not come yet for you to abandon your life of sin and submit totally to My Commands?" It is as though He is asking: "When will you repent and enter into Islām fully?"

Allāh ﷻ is asking us to contemplate over the great favours He has bestowed upon us. He created us from nothing, gave us eyes to see with, ears to hear with, a tongue to speak with, a mind to think with and, most importantly, He made us from amongst the followers of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ. Allāh ﷻ is asking: "Despite all these favours, has the time still not come for you to become mine in totality?"

There is such great emphasis in these words of Allāh ﷻ that if the doors of our hearts were open even a little bit, there would be no need for any lectures or religious gatherings; this verse would be sufficient to make people flock towards the straight path and declare:

سرِ تسلیم خم ہے جو مزاج یار میں آئے

My head is bowed in submission:
Whatever You may desire of me.

The Positive Response

Believers will find themselves in one of two parties when it comes to responding to this verse. Some believers will respond positively, and immediately resolve that the time has indeed come for them to become obedient to their Creator, while others will ignore it and pay it no heed. May Allāh ﷻ make us all from the first party.

From among those who answered positively to this verse and for whom it became a turning point in their lives was Shaykh Fuḍayl ibn ʻIyāḍ ﵀, one of the great awliyā (special friends) of Allāh ﷻ. In his earlier life he was a burglar and had also fallen in love with a young lady. One night he was on his way for a rendezvous with his beloved. As he was climbing over the wall of her house he heard

a voice. He listened, and as good fortune would have it, it was this verse of the Qur'ān that was being recited:

أَلَمْ يَأْنِ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَنْ تَخْشَعَ قُلُوبُهُمْ لِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَمَا نَزَلَ مِنَ الْحَقِّ

> Has the time not yet come for the believers that their hearts submit before the remembrance of Allāh and the Truth that has been revealed? (57:16)

It was as if Allāh ﷻ was asking Shaykh Fuḍayl ﵀ directly: "O you whose heart I have blessed with īmān, has the time still not come for you to submit to Me completely? Has the time still not come for you to leave adultery/fornication, impermissible love and burglary and submit totally to Me?"

The verse entered through the ears of Shaykh Fuḍayl ibn 'Iyāḍ ﵀ and went straight to his heart. He immediately called out:

قَدْ آنَ وَ قَدْ حَانَ

> The time has definitely come; it is definitely now.

He did not hesitate but immediately turned to his Creator: “O Allāh ﷻ! You have given me so many blessings. You have given me the great gift of īmān, the great gift of the Qur’ān: how can I deny these and say that the time has not yet come?”

Shaykh Fuḍayl’s ﷺ response was immediate. He did not choose to wait for Laylatul-Qadr or Ramaḍān or hajj or ‘umrah; he responded immediately to the call of Allāh ﷻ. The very same person who, only a few seconds ago, was treading the path of Shayṭān, came onto the path of Raḥmān after hearing just one āyah of the Qur’ān.

The staunchness with which Shaykh Fuḍayl ﷺ embraced the straight path led him to be recognised as one the great awliyā of this ummah, and his name is remembered to this day. When scholars quote him they precede his name with ‘Shaykh’ and follow it with ‘may Allāh ﷻ have mercy on him’. The books of tafsīr are filled with his sayings, and when the experts of ḥadīth write their commentaries they have no choice but to

quote what Shaykh Fuḍayl ibn ʻIyāḍ ﷺ said on the subject.

How Can We Disobey Allāh ﷻ?

Let us consider for a moment the great favours Allāh ﷻ has bestowed upon us. He created us from nothing and made us in the most beautiful of forms. More significantly, He gave us the greatest of blessings, the blessing of īmān and thereafter he made us from the ummah of the greatest prophet, our beloved Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ. Yet, despite being blessed with all these gifts, our disobedience still persists.

When we think about our parents, we remember all that they have done for us and so feel that we cannot disobey them. But just think, in comparison to the favours of our parents, how numerous and great are the favours of Allāh ﷻ?

Similarly, we feel we cannot disobey our teachers due to their favours, yet they were only a means

to acquiring knowledge, in reality knowledge is a gift from Allāh ﷻ. A person connected to a shaykh values the favours of his shaykh - how he trained him and taught him how to live as a proper human being. If he values his shaykh, who is a means through which Allāh ﷻ rectifies the condition of man, how much should he value Allāh ﷻ, who created his shaykh and made him the means of his rectification?

Whatever we have in this world, whatever we have attained, all of it has come from Allāh ﷻ. Wealth, good health, time, good character traits - these are all gifts from Allāh ﷻ. We have been given a lot, and Allāh ﷻ is willing to give even more.

وَلَلْآخِرَةُ خَيْرٌ لَّكَ مِنَ الْأُولَىٰ ﴿٤﴾

> Indeed, the hereafter is better for you than the present [life]. (93:4)

Though this āyah is addressed to Rasūlullāh ﷺ it is also applicable to every future inhabitant of

Jannah. The hereafter, for those who enter Jannah, will be better than their worldly life. The blessings that will be received tomorrow will be better than the blessings of today. Allāh ﷾ is the true and real giver of favours; in fact, He is the only true Muḥsin (Benefactor).

Realise Who You are Disobeying

Allāh ﷾ is not only the true Giver and Most Beneficent, He is also the All-Powerful. Unfortunately, we are not chastened by this realisation. The thought does not cross our minds when casting lustful glances that perhaps Allāh ﷾ will take away our ability to see; when we backbite we do not fear the possibility of Allāh ﷾ striking us dumb; when listening to music we forget the power of Allāh ﷾ to make us deaf. We do not even consider while our feet are taking us towards adultery/fornication that at the Command of Allāh ﷾ the earth can split open and swallow us, or that as we go about with evil thoughts in

our minds Allāh ﷿ can cause stones to rain down from the sky upon our heads.

ءَأَمِنتُم مَّن فِي السَّمَاءِ أَن يَخْسِفَ بِكُمُ الْأَرْضَ فَإِذَا هِيَ
تَمُورُ ﴿١٦﴾ أَمْ أَمِنتُم مَّن فِي السَّمَاءِ أَن يُرْسِلَ عَلَيْكُمْ حَاصِبًا ۖ
فَسَتَعْلَمُونَ كَيْفَ نَذِيرِ ﴿١٧﴾

> Do you feel secure that He who is in the sky will not make you sink into the earth, and behold! it starts trembling? Or do you feel secure that He who is in the sky will not release a violent wind with stones against you? You will soon know how My warning was.(67:16-17)

Allāh ﷿ only ever sent punishment on a people because of their disobedience.

وَمَا ظَلَمَهُمُ اللَّهُ وَلَٰكِنْ أَنفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ ﴿١١٧﴾

> Allāh ﷿ has not wronged them; rather they wronged themselves. (3:117)

فَكُلًّا أَخَذْنَا بِذَنۢبِهِۦ ۖ فَمِنْهُم مَّنْ أَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِ حَاصِبًا وَمِنْهُم مَّنْ أَخَذَتْهُ ٱلصَّيْحَةُ وَمِنْهُم مَّنْ خَسَفْنَا بِهِ ٱلْأَرْضَ وَمِنْهُم مَّنْ أَغْرَقْنَا ۚ وَمَا كَانَ ٱللَّهُ لِيَظْلِمَهُمْ وَلَٰكِن كَانُوٓا۟ أَنفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ ﴿٤٠﴾

> We seized every one of them for his sin. From them were those against whom We sent a violent wind; and from them were those who were seized by a Cry [of Jibra'īl ﷺ]; and from them were those We caused to sink into the earth; and from them were those We drowned. And Allāh was not to do injustice to them, but they used to do injustice to themselves. (29:40)

It is only through the Mercy of Allāh ﷻ that His punishment has not befallen us yet, otherwise the Qur'ān warns us:

مَا يَنظُرُونَ إِلَّا صَيْحَةً وَٰحِدَةً تَأْخُذُهُمْ وَهُمْ يَخِصِّمُونَ ﴿٤٩﴾

> They await nothing but a single blast, which will seize them while they are still arguing

> with each other. (36:49)

We need to repent at this very moment. Make tawbah to Allāh ﷻ and say: "O Allāh! I have rectified my relationship with you." Do not even wait until you reach the end of this book. We have no guarantee that we will live to take another breath.

Repent now, sincerely and from the heart. After finishing this book you should perfom two raka'āt and lift your hands in supplication and cry and make du'ā, but right now, repent sincerely to Allāh ﷻ and give Him the positive answer to the question:

أَلَمْ يَأْنِ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَن تَخْشَعَ قُلُوبُهُمْ لِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَمَا نَزَلَ
مِنَ الْحَقِّ

> Has the time not yet come for the believers that their hearts submit before the remembrance of Allāh and the Truth that has been revealed? (57:16)

Become a Walī of Allāh ﷾

We need to join the group of Shaykh Fuḍayl ibn ‘Iyāḍ رحمة الله عليه. We need to make a firm promise to Allāh ﷾ that there will be no more disobedience, no more sin. This is what wilāyah (special friendship of Allāh ﷾) is - that a person purifies his life from sin. We may stand at length in tahajjud, fast regularly, spend the whole night reciting the Qur’ān and be occupied with tasbīḥāt at all times, but if we also continue to sin, we cannot be classed as awliyā (special friends) of Allāh ﷾. Abstaining from the disobedience of our Merciful Creator Allāh ﷾ is the essence of being a walī. Voluntary worship should also be observed because through it the heart becomes steadfast and firm, thereby making it easier to refrain from sin, but the most important thing is to ensure we refrain from all sins.

This concept can be understood from the following example. A man offers his ‘Ishā Ṣalāh with congregation and then immediately goes

to sleep. He then wakes up for Fajr Ṣalāh with congregation. He prayed 'Ishā and Fajr with congregation but otherwise spent the whole night asleep. A second person does the same and in addition spends the whole night in worship. However during the night, for only five minutes, he involves himself in backbiting. The first man is a walī but the second one is not. The second person may have been worshipping the whole night but he is not a walī, because someone who disobeys Allāh ﷻ cannot be His walī. Therefore, we need to adopt the habit of safeguarding ourselves from all major and minor sin.

The Negative Response

However, there will be some people who feel they cannot give up the pleasure of certain sins they are habituated to. Despite this verse affecting their hearts, despite their minds understanding and despite Allāh ﷻ granting them opportunities, like He did to Shaykh Fuḍayl ibn 'Iyāḍ ﷺ, to leave

the path of Shayṭān and come on to the path of Raḥmān, they will not be prepared to give up the illusory pleasure of sins.

In the next part of the verse, this second group is given a severe warning by Allāh سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَىٰ.

وَلَا يَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ مِن قَبْلُ

> They must not become like those to whom the Book was given before... (57:16)

What did they do? They had also accepted īmān, but after that they did not leave certain things that Allāh سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَىٰ had made impermissible and which they enjoyed. They continued in the disobedience of Allāh سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَىٰ.

فَطَالَ عَلَيْهِمُ الْأَمَدُ فَقَسَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ ؕ وَكَثِيرٌ مِّنْهُمْ فَاسِقُونَ ﴿١٦﴾

> ...and then a long time passed and their hearts became hard. And many of them were transgressors. (57:16)

In the first part of the verse Allāh سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَىٰ is asking us:

"Has the time not yet come for you to become obedient?" In the next portion of the verse Allāh ﷻ warns us not to be like those who ignored His warning and continued in a life of sin. They had also received the opportunity of religious gatherings and they had also received days and nights full of barakah, and their hearts had also entertained the desire to rectify their lives, but they did not do so. Instead they remained engrossed in sin until Allāh ﷻ closed the doors of their hearts. Thus, our answer to this question from Allāh ﷻ should be the same that Shaykh Fuḍayl ibn 'Iyāḍ ؒ gave:

قَدْ آنَ وَ قَدْ حَانَ

The time has definitely come; it is definitely now.

Don't Close the Doors of Guidance

If we do not respond positively to this question, we will face a similar punishment as the past nations faced: Allāh ﷻ closed the doors of their hearts. And when Allāh ﷻ closes the doors of the heart

no power in the world can re-open them. They can be opened neither by a Nabī nor a walī.

إِنَّكَ لَا تَهْدِي مَنْ أَحْبَبْتَ وَلَٰكِنَّ اللَّهَ يَهْدِي مَن يَشَاءُ ۚ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ ﴿٥٦﴾

> You (O Muḥammad ﷺ) cannot guide whom you wish, but Allāh ﷻ guides whom He wills. And He knows best those who are guided. (28:56)

This is why Allāh ﷻ revealed the following verse in order to comfort Rasūlullāh ﷺ regarding those who refused to bring faith in him despite his great efforts:

لَعَلَّكَ بَاخِعٌ نَّفْسَكَ أَلَّا يَكُونُوا مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٣﴾

> Perhaps you are going to kill yourself out of grief that they do not become believers. (26:3)

Rasūlullāh ﷺ felt immense grief over those people whose hearts had become hardened, veiled and closed, so Allāh ﷻ revealed these verses to comfort

him, reassuring him that he should not worry if they do not bring faith, as guiding them is beyond his control and is only in the control of Allāh ﷾.

خَتَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمْ وَعَلَىٰ سَمْعِهِمْ ۖ وَعَلَىٰ أَبْصَارِهِمْ غِشَاوَةٌ
وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ ۝٧

> Allāh has set a seal on their hearts and on their hearing; and on their eyes there is a covering. And for them awaits a mighty punishment. (2:7)

لَهُمْ قُلُوبٌ لَّا يَفْقَهُونَ بِهَا وَلَهُمْ أَعْيُنٌ لَّا يُبْصِرُونَ بِهَا وَلَهُمْ
آذَانٌ لَّا يَسْمَعُونَ بِهَا ۚ أُولَٰئِكَ كَالْأَنْعَامِ بَلْ هُمْ أَضَلُّ ۚ
أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْغَافِلُونَ ۝١٧٩

> They have hearts with which they do not understand, eyes with which they do not see, and ears with which they do not hear. They are like cattle - rather, they are even more astray. They are the heedless ones. (7:179)

In the eyes of Allāh ﷾ they are worse than animals.

This is because animals fulfil the purpose of their creation: they graze, drink water, and provide milk for humans. They eat grass, become strong, and provide a means of transport for man. They eat and drink and become fattened, after which man can benefit from their meat and utilise their skin.

Opportunity After Opportunity

We need to pay great attention to the message in this verse. We continuously sin yet when the day of Jumu‘ah arrives and we listen to the words of the khaṭīb, Allāh سبحانه وتعالى lets us shed a few tears. He opens the doors of guidance for us and He puts the blessed thought in our minds that after leaving the masjid we will remain on the straight path.

But we do not remain on the straight path and instead continue our sinful lives until the next Friday. Again, Allāh سبحانه وتعالى softens our hearts and again He allows us to contemplate. Allāh سبحانه وتعالى gives us another opportunity but again we ignore it and our lives stay the same.

Then the month of Ramaḍān comes and Allāh ﷻ gives us another opportunity to reflect. He guides us to the masjid and gatherings where advice and guidance are imparted; He lets us sit in the company of the pious and He opens the doors of guidance. He establishes in our hearts and minds the thought that our lives will now change for the better. We repent and do tawbah, but after Ramaḍān is gone our life returns to how it was before, and we again waste another valuable opportunity granted to us by Allāh ﷻ.

Laylatul-Barā'ah comes and the same thing happens; Laylatul-Qadr comes and the same thing happens. Allāh ﷻ gives us the chance to go for hajj, 'umrah, da'wah purposes, or to benefit from the company of a shaykh but the same thing happens. Opportunity upon opportunity is given to us but we do not change our ways.

Remember, Allāh ﷻ does not close the doors of guidance for anyone. It is only when a person is given opportunity after opportunity and he

continually turns his face away that Allāh ﷾ closes the doors of guidance and seals his heart. Then his fate is sealed and he is destined for Jahannam and the doors of guidance are closed forever. This is what happened to the people who were given the book before us.

فَطَالَ عَلَيْهِمُ الْأَمَدُ فَقَسَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ ۖ وَكَثِيرٌ مِّنْهُمْ فَاسِقُونَ ﴿١٦﴾

> ...and then a long time passed and their hearts became hard. And many of them were transgressors. (57:16)

The commentators of the Qur’ān have interpreted the word *fāsiqūn* (sinners) as *kāfirūn* (disbelievers) in this verse. A fāsiq or disobedient person can be either a Muslim who, after bringing faith, disobeys Allāh ﷾ or a person who does not bring faith at all, the latter being guilty of greater disobedience. This verse discusses those who brought faith but spent their lives in sin and did not repent, until a time came when Allāh ﷾ made their hearts hard. ‘Many of them were transgressors’ in this verse implies that if a believer persists in sinning, a day

will come when he will leave the fold of Islām and enter into kufr. May Allāh ﷾ protect us all.

Safeguarding our Īmān

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَكُونُوا مَعَ الصَّادِقِينَ ﴿١١٩﴾

> O you who believe, fear Allāh and be with the truthful. (9:119)

There are three commands given in this verse: īmān, taqwā (safeguarding oneself from sin) and adoption of the company of truthful, god-fearing people. In this verse Allāh ﷾ teaches us that if we want to safeguard our īmān we have to save ourselves from sin by adopting taqwā. After accepting faith, failure to safeguard ourselves from sin means our īmān will not strengthen, and instead will weaken. And by continually weakening, the chances are that īmān will be lost altogether and be replaced by disbelief. So the rule is this: in order to safeguard your īmān, it is necessary to protect yourself from sin. And in

order to be able to stay away from this, we need to adopt the company of the pious. Through the company of the pious, a person attains the ability to refrain from sin and becomes a Walī of Allāh ﷻ. Thereafter, the company of pious, god-fearing people assisits towards more progress in taqwā.

So Allāh ﷻ is telling us that if we wish to safeguard our īmān, we need to protect ourselves from sin, and if we wish to integrate the practice of refraining from sin into our lives and if we wish to illuminate our hearts with the light of taqwā then we must remain connected with the pious, i.e. those who are truthful in word and deed, and whose inner condition and external condition are the same. If the company of the pious is not adopted, then the standard of taqwā that is required will not be achieved. And if the standard of taqwā is not achieved, then the standard of īmān that is required will not remain. And it is possible that as the level of taqwā decreases, and sinfulness continues to increase, a time will come

when īmān itself will diminish. (May Allāh ﷿ save us all. Āmīn)

A Deceptive Thought

وَنُقَلِّبُ أَفْئِدَتَهُمْ وَأَبْصَارَهُمْ كَمَا لَمْ يُؤْمِنُوا بِهِ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ
وَنَذَرُهُمْ فِي طُغْيَانِهِمْ يَعْمَهُونَ ﴿١١٠﴾

> We will upset their hearts and their eyes, even as they did not believe therein in the first instance, and we will leave them wandering blindly in their rebellion. (6:110)

Who are the people referred to in this verse? It is those whom Divine Knowledge knows are so engrossed in sin that even if the doors of opportunity are opened for them, they will not enter. As a result Allāh ﷿ closes the doors of guidance upon them.

Therefore, we need to try as hard as possible to refrain from sin. When Shayṭān and the nafs place the idea in our hearts that a sinful believer will one day or the other enter Jannah, they are

playing a clever trick on us. In response, we should ask ourselves that with our sinful lives, what guarantee do we have that we will even leave this world with īmān? Secondly, even if we do leave this world with īmān, can we honestly say we are courageous enough to face spending a few days in Jahannam before being granted entry into Jannah? We cannot even bear the warmth and closeness of the masjid when it is filled during Tarāwīḥ Ṣalāh in Ramaḍān! When we are unable to bear the heat of a tiny flame in this world, how can we be foolhardy enough to assume we can tolerate the raging fires of Jahannam even for a second? Rasūlullāh ﷺ has said:

وَ لَوْ اَنَّ شَرَرَةً مِنْ شَرَرِ جَهَنَّمَ بِالْمَشْرِقِ لَوُجِدَ حَرُّهَا بِالْمَغْرِبِ (طبرانی)

> If one spark from the fire of hell was let loose in the East, its heat would be felt in the west. (Ṭabrānī)

Allāh ﷻ states regarding those who will be thrown

into the fire of Jahannam:

كُلَّمَا نَضِجَتْ جُلُودُهُمْ بَدَّلْنٰهُمْ جُلُودًا غَيْرَهَا لِيَذُوقُوا الْعَذَابَ ؕ

Whenever their skins are burnt out, we shall change them for other skins, so that they may taste the punishment. (4:56)

And when, due to the extreme heat, they will feel thirsty and beg for something to drink:

مِنْ وَّرَآئِهٖ جَهَنَّمُ وَيُسْقٰى مِنْ مَّآءٍ صَدِيْدٍ ﴿۱۶﴾ يَّتَجَرَّعُهٗ وَلَا يَكَادُ يُسِيْغُهٗ وَيَاْتِيْهِ الْمَوْتُ مِنْ كُلِّ مَكَانٍ وَّمَا هُوَ بِمَيِّتٍ ؕ وَمِنْ وَّرَآئِهٖ عَذَابٌ غَلِيْظٌ ﴿۱۷﴾

Jahannam is before him, and he will be made to drink fluid like pus, which he will arduously sip and he will not be able to swallow. Death will come upon him from every side, yet he will not die, and still a heavy chastisement will be ahead of him (14:17)

So do not let the thought even cross your mind,

let alone be uttered, that you are prepared to spend time in Jahannam before being given entry into Jannah. We need to abandon unlawful pleasures and beg Allāh ﷾ for His Faḍl (Grace) and ask Him to safeguard us from even having to go near Jahannam.

Revive Your Heart

After becoming aware of the warning contained in this verse, sinful people may become despondent. They may think that they are so involved in sins that maybe a veil has already fallen over their hearts and now they have no chance of salvation. Allāh ﷾ specifically addresses such people when He goes on to say:

اِعْلَمُوْا اَنَّ اللّٰهَ يُحْيِ الْاَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا ۭ قَدْ بَيَّنَّا لَكُمُ الْاٰيٰتِ
لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُوْنَ ﴿١٧﴾

> Know well that Allāh revives the land after its death. We have made clear the signs for you that you may understand. (57:17)

Allāh سبحانه وتعالى is informing us that He is the One who can revive the earth after it has become completely parched, just by causing a little rain to fall onto it. The Being Who has that power also has the power to send down His Mercy on the parched fields of the heart of one who turns to Him in repentance, and make it lush and verdant.

Our hearts have become hard and lifeless due to the continuous onslaught of sins. As we commit sin after sin our hearts become clouded and choked by the stains of impurity and filth that is the disobedience of Allāh سبحانه وتعالى. As a result, our hearts become barren, spiritually dead and unresponsive. They are not affected by religious talks and admonishment and even if a janāzah passes in front of us, they do not feel anything.

Allāh سبحانه وتعالى orders such people, whose hearts have become dead, to do istighfār (ask for forgiveness), to turn to Him and shed tears of regret. Allāh سبحانه وتعالى relates the advice of Nūḥ عليه السلام to his intransigent people:

فَقُلْتُ اسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّكُمْ إِنَّهُ كَانَ غَفَّارًا ﴿١٠﴾ يُرْسِلِ السَّمَاءَ
عَلَيْكُم مِّدْرَارًا ﴿١١﴾ وَيُمْدِدْكُم بِأَمْوَالٍ وَبَنِينَ وَيَجْعَل لَّكُمْ
جَنَّاتٍ وَيَجْعَل لَّكُمْ أَنْهَارًا ﴿١٢﴾

> Pray to your Lord for forgiveness, indeed he is very forgiving; and he will cause the heavens to rain upon you in abundance and help you with riches and sons; and will cause gardens to grow for you and cause rivers to flow for you. (71:10)

If we cannot cry then at least an expression of crying should be adopted. We should go into sajdah and beseech Allāh ﷻ for His Mercy.

Ḥāfiẓ Ibn Ḥajar al-Asqalāni ؒ [or Shaykh Ashraf ‘Ali Thānwi ؒ] states that the blessings of istighfār are such that when a servant turns to Allāh ﷻ and repents sincerely, Allāh ﷻ sends down two types of rain: one in the form of water from the skies and the other in the form of mercy from His ‘Arsh. Water rains onto the earth and

gives the dead earth life and makes it fertile, while Mercy rains onto the hearts of the believers and revives them from the death brought on by evil deeds, giving them the life and vigour that come from good deeds.

Continue Trying and Have Hope

Do not look here and there at the lives of others but look at your own lives. After assessing your life, identify the negative points and then turn to Allāh ﷾, shedding tears in seclusion and make every attempt to please Him. Allāh ﷾ is not obstinate like us. Rasūlullāh ﷺ has mentioned in a ḥadīth that Allāh ﷾ says:

اِذَا تَقَرَّبَ الْعَبْدُ اِلَیَّ شِبْرًا تَقَرَّبْتُ اِلَیْهِ ذِرَاعًا وَ اِذَا تَقَرَّبَ
اِلَیَّ ذِرَاعًا تَقَرَّبْتُ مِنْهُ بَاعًا وَ اِذَا اَتَانِیْ یَمْشِیْ اَتَیْتُهُ هَرْوَلَةً

> When a servant draws near to Me by a hand span, I draw near to him by a cubit; and when he draws near to Me by a cubit, I draw near to him by the distance between two outstretched

arms. And if he comes to Me walking, I go to him running. (Bukhārī)

In another ḥadīth Rasūlullāh ﷺ quotes Allāh ﷻ saying:

يَا ابْنَ آدَمَ! اِنَّکَ مَا دَعَوْتَنِیْ وَ رَجَوْتَنِیْ غَفَرْتُ لَکَ عَلٰی مَا کَانَ مِنْکَ وَ لَا اُبَالِیْ، یَا ابْنَ آدَمَ! لَوْ بَلَغَتْ ذُنُوْبُکَ عِنَانَ السَّمَاءِ ثُمَّ اسْتَغْفَرْتَنِیْ غَفَرْتُ لَکَ، یَا ابْنَ آدَمَ لَوْ اَتَیْتَنِیْ بِقُرَابِ الْاَرْضِ خَطَایَا ثُمَّ لَقِیْتَنِیْ لَا تُشْرِکُ بِیْ شَیْئًا لَاَتَیْتُکَ بِقُرَابِهَا مَغْفِرَةً (ترمذی)

O son of Ādam! As long as you continue to call to me and have hope in Me I will forgive your sins and I will not care [as to which sin or how many sins you committed]. O son of Ādam! If your sins were so great that they reached the sky, and then you asked me for forgiveness, I would forgive you! O son of Ādam! If you came with sins that filled the earth, then met Me in the condition that you did not ascribe partners to me, I would grant you forgiveness that filled the earth. (Tirmidhī)

This does not mean though that at the same time as hoping in the Mercy and Forgiveness of Allāh ﷾ we continue living a life of sin. How can we say that Allāh ﷾ is forgiving and merciful and yet continue to do what we know will incur His displeasure and lead us towards the fire of Jahannam?

We must remember that a mu'min does not make a programme to commit sin, rather he falls into sin. For example, someone may resolve not to commit a particular sin ever again, but later a situation arises where, due to the pressures of Shayṭān and the nafs, he ends up committing it. Although a sin was committed, it was not premeditated or planned.

As long as we continue to turn to Allāh ﷾ and try to please Him with our actions, His help will be with us. If after slipping and falling into sin we continue to knock at His door, with real hope and conviction, then Allāh ﷾ will not care about our sins and He will continue to forgive us.

From this ḥadīth we understand that there is still hope for us. If we turn to Allāh ﷻ with sincerity and say: "O Allāh! I have filled the space between the heavens and the earth with sin. O Allāh Forgive my sins," Allāh ﷻ will not turn us away. He will respond with mercy and forgiveness enough to fill the space between the heavens and the earth! As a poet says:

ہم تو مائل بکرم ہیں کوئی سائل ہی نہیں

راہ دکھلائیں کسے راہ روِ منزل ہی نہیں

We are willing to forgive, but no one is asking.

Whom shall We guide on the straight path, there is no one walking towards the destination?

Respond to the Call

هَلْ مِنْ سَائِلٍ يُعْطٰى؟ هَلْ مِنْ دَاعٍ يُسْتَجَابُ لَهُ؟ هَلْ مِنْ مُسْتَغْفِرٍ يُغْفَرُ لَهُ؟ (مسلم)

Is there anyone asking so that I may grant him what he desires? Is there anyone supplicating

> to me so that I may accept his supplication? Is there anyone seeking forgiveness so that I may forgive him? (Muslim)

In short, Allāh ﷾ is asking if there is anyone who wishes to change the direction of his life so that Allāh ﷾ may turn His attention towards him and remove him from the path of Shayṭān and put him on His path?

This call from Allāh ﷾ is being made at this very moment. Allāh ﷾, despite being independent and free of all need, despite being the Lord of all the Worlds, wants us to rectify our relationship with Him. By rights, we should be running towards Him, but He Himself is turning towards us and is asking us to repent from our sinful ways. How merciful and compassionate is Allāh ﷾!

Regardless of the nature and quantity of sins we may be committing, this call is for each and every one of us. Allāh ﷾ is always ready to forgive, always ready to accept our efforts to rectify our relationship with Him, always ready to fulfil all

our needs. All that is required is that we prostrate before Him in repentance and beg Him to forgive us. We need to take hold of this opportunity and not let it go to waste, lest we be punished for our ingratitude in not responding to the call by being deprived of another chance in the future. May it not happen that the doors of mercy and guidance are closed to us forever.

It is a blessing in itself that we are reading this book; this is also a favour of Allāh ﷻ and He is allowing us to read this book because he wants us to turn to Him so He can forgive us.

Turn your attention towards Allāh ﷻ and make tawbah. Do not assume that because at this moment you feel unable to leave a particular sin you will never leave it. Make a firm intention that from today you will no longer commit that or any other sin. Then try your best to live up to your resolution.

Do not despair. Remember, your Lord is the One who gives life to the barren earth. If He can give

life to the dead earth, he can also give life to our dead hearts. He will give them everlasting life and fill them with His love and His awareness. And He will transform our hearts from being useless and feeble into being highly precious and valuable.

وہ گل گل نہیں جس میں بو نہیں
وہ دل دل نہیں جس میں تو نہیں

A flower that has no fragrance is not a flower;

A heart that does not contain You is not a heart.

مَثَلُ الَّذِیْ یَذْکُرُ رَبَّهُ وَ الَّذِیْ لَا یَذْکُرُ مَثَلُ الْحَیِّ وَ الْمَیِّتِ
(بخاری)

The example of one who remembers his Lord and one who does not is like a living person and a dead one. (Bukhārī)

Allāh ﷻ is willing to give life to our dead hearts. If Allāh ﷻ did not wish to revive our hearts then He would not have given us the opportunity to read these words. The fact that you are reading

this book is a sign that Allāh ﷻ wishes to envelop you in His Mercy.

Final Words

We need to pay attention and respond positively to the call in the āyah of the Qur'ān we have been discussing. We need to save ourselves totally from sin and disobedience of Allāh ﷻ. In order to do this we need to adopt the company of the pious and save ourselves from bad company. We also need to remain steadfast with our ma'mūlāt (daily practices). The more steadfast we will be with good deeds, the stronger and firmer our hearts will become. And the stronger our hearts become the easier it will become to refrain from sin.

We also need to establish a strong connection with our shaykh (spiritual mentor) and continue to inform him of our spiritual condition. Shayṭān and the nafs often overpower us, involve us in sin and prevent us from seeking guidance from our

shaykh. By depriving us of the means of guidance and help, Shayṭān and the nafs gradually take us very far from Dīn. We reach a stage where we lose awareness that we are getting older and closer to death and that at any time we may leave this world with the burden of all our accumulated sins on our shoulders.

May Allāh ﷻ grant us all the ability to think over what we have read and truly understand it. And May He grant us all the ability to turn to Him today, without any further delay, and to declare with courage, firmness and sincerity that the time has indeed come for us to change our lives. Āmīn.